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ABSTRACT

Characteristics that seem to separate effective and ineffective teacher evaluation systems provide a framework for viewing existing evaluation systems and determining necessary changes. Nine commonalities represent the best practices: (1) participants share an attitude that the purpose of an evaluation system is to provide assistance in the improvement of instruction; (2) the requirements placed on the participants in a system completely relect the actual purpose of the system; (3) teacher evaluation is separate from teaching evaluation; (4) some form of goal setting exists between the teacher and the supervisor as the basic supervisory activity; (5) a narrow focus on the teaching act is used for the instructional interaction between supervisors and teachers; (6) preconferences occur prior to observation as suggested by the clinical supervision model; (7) student evaluation and artifacts (study guides, tests, homework assignments) are used in addition to classroom observation; (8) different requirements are made for tenured and nontenured teachers; and, (9) a complete training program is offered for both supervisors and teachers. (MLF)

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DEVELOPING A TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM: COMMONALITIES OF THOSE SYSTEMS THAT FUNCTION MOST EFFECTIVELY

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Few areas in education are more discussed yet less understood than teacher evaluation. It is an issue that transcends organizational levels, curriculum packages, subject matter areas, and teacher styles. School supervisors and teachers are unanimous in expressing their desire for increased emphasis on the development of rational and useful evaluation/supervision systems.

This article is written to address the needs of those school districts and professional educators who want a framework for looking at the evaluation systems that now exist for them and want direction in determining the appropriate alterations that might be possible or useful. There is no intent to "sell" a particular model but rather to provide a perspective on the characteristics that seem to separate effective and ineffective systems.

Throughout this article reference will be made to "effective" or "successful" evaluation systems. It is important that some definition be provided regarding the use of these or similar terms. The complexity of the measurement problems prevents any definition of success or effectiveness at an empirical level. The leap from changes in a supervisory system or from changes in an individual supervisor's behavior to such measureable outcomes as student achievement is far to confounding. Rather we must base such definitions on the assessment of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings as expressed by people involved in a system. But this is neither inappropriate nor

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unreliable. Judgments made on the basis of direct involvement by trained, experienced professionals constitutes a valuable and reliable source of data.[1] Consequently, as I discuss characteristics of sytems that seem to be "more effective," that judgment is based on the opinions of the people who are directly involved and who feel that it works for them.

There are two things that a school district must do if it is to increase the effectiveness of its evaluation system:

1) It must look seriously at the evaluation system that now exists, particularly with regard to its purposes, precedures, processes, and instrumentation. It is imperative that congruence exists between the things a district wants its system to be and to do and those things that a system requires of the people involved.

2) The district must provide <u>all</u> the members of the school with appropriate training and guided practice in the skills and knowledge necessary to implement and effectively maintain the system.

It is my purpose to address primarily the first of these requirements. This concern for the procedural side of evaluation is not intended to deny the importance of the individual relationship between the supervisor and the teacher. Experience shows that a positive, supportive relationship between a knowledgeable supervisor and a teacher is still the most effective way to produce improved instruction. Unfortunately, the relationships that exist in the average school setting are not always as positive as would be desired. In many instances the breakdown in these relations is fostered by the system and its unrealistic demands and expectations. It is increasingly apparent that not only must adequate training be provided to all the participants, but they must also be provided with a system that supports and enhances supervisor-teacher relationships.

The author has spent the last seven years working with approximately 300 school districts and 75,000 supervisors and teachers around the country in an attempt to build evaluation systems that reflect their unique local needs. Out of this experience, nine commonalities have emerged that seem to represent a set of best practices. These nine commonalities have proven to be extremely useful for districts to use as they review their own systems. Of the nine, it does not seem necessary that all be present before a reasonable set of procedures and practices can be implemented. Rather they seem to provide a perspective, an awareness of alternatives, and if need be, a set of directions for schools to consider.

1. Attitude

In developing evaluation systems, traditional models have emphasized the accountability function of evaluation. This emphasis, coupled with the push for instructional improvement that characterizes recommended supervisory models, has promoted the development of evaluation systems that attempt to walk the line between accountability and instructional improvement. This is extraordinarily difficult to do. In order to build the consistency within a system that seems to be necessary to increase the likelihood of its successful implementation one must go one way or the other. Generally, accountability oriented systems are designed to provide a mechanism for obtaining clear and consistent documentaton of inappropriate teacher behavior. Consequently, supervisors are forced to collect data, use instruments, and act in a directive manner that allows for summative evaluation of performance. Approaches founded on this type of attitude are generally based on a misunderstanding of the requirements of documentation and/or a lack of basic information about

what is needed for the teacher dismissal procedure to be successful. Experience and available data[2] suggests that evalation systems based on this type of attitude promote negative feelings about evaluation which in turn leads to a lack of participation and a lower liklihood of teachers being willing to alter classroom behavior. In almost all instances evaluation system built around an accountability orientation seldom are characterized by a willingness to improve instructional behavior. But systems built around the concept of improving instruction are always accompanied by an acceptable level of acquired accountability information. An attitude must exist all the way to the top of an organization that truly the purpose of an evaluation system, particularly for tenured teachers, is to provide assistance in the improvement of instruction.

II. Complementary Procedures, Processes, and Instrumentation

This second commonality relates directly to the general attitude towards evaluation discussed in item #1. The requirements placed on the participants in a system must completely reflect the actual purpose of the system. Too often evaluation systems state in their preambles, "the primary purpose of evaluation is the improvement of instruction," and then saddle their supervisors and teachers with procedures, processes, and instrumentation that require ratings on standardized criteria that are heavily loaded toward administrative concerns; that produce high supervisor - low teacher involvement; and that promote unfocused, superficial classroom visitation.

In most instances the ultimate test in determining the effectiveness of an evaluation system is that which occurs at the bottom of the system - the relationship and the mutual trust that exists between the supervisor and the teacher when they meet. An evaluation system must be established that

allows for the fewest possible infringements upon this relationship. The key to success at the points of contact between supervisor and teacher is the amount of flexibility they have in working on and towards the particular skills, knowledge, techniques, styles, etc. that best fit that teacher's needs and interests. A school cannot expect to have an effective system by espousing one purpose and then requiring the persons within the system to follow procedures which are non-complementary to that purpose.

III. Separation of Administrative and Supervisory Behavior

While this may seem an idealistic notion, movement towards this ideal seems to be an important part of establishing an effective evaluation system. Obviously this commonality is closely related to numbers I and II discussed above. With an emphasis on instructional improvement there is a need for procedures which help supervisors to separate as much as possible <u>teacher</u> evaluation from <u>teaching</u> evaluation. One of the major violations of this concept occurs during the common practice of using district wide summative evalation instruments (rating scales or narratives directed toward making evaluative statements on standardized criteria) as the basis for evaluating classroom performance following observation. In many instances as high as 75% of the criteria are administrative in nature and have nothing to do with the type of data collected during a classroom visit. Formative evaluation techniques are used to make summative judgments on non-relevant criteria.

Many tough, accountability oriented boards of education have been sold on this concept by accepting the notion that there are a set of minimum expectations for teachers that are primarily administrative and/or personal in nature (adherence to school policy, appearance, personal relationships, relationships with parents and community, etc.) that are continuously monitored

by the informal and unobtrusive nature of administrators and teachers working, living and interacting in the same environment. No special set of procedures and instrumentation needs to be established to deal with these issues. As violations in these areas occur they are dealt with as they should be, when or immediately after they happen. There is no need to store up evaluation comments on administrative criteria for inclusion in conferences following classroom observations. Teachers accept bureaucratic rules and procedures if they are dealt with in an appropriate manner and at the appropriate time. This approach allows the supervisor and the teacher to focus their time together on instructional matters that can rely on formative evaluation techniques that foster a more collegial, supervisory oriented relationship between them. Again, the importance of an appropriate and consistent attitude being supported by complementary requirements is reinforced.

IV. Goal Setting

In those systems that function most effectively a recurring commonality is the presence of some form of goal setting between the teacher and the supervisor as the basic supervisory activity. Goal setting as a means for focusing supervisory attention has grown dramatically in recent years. It has been a logical outgrowth of the increased opposition to evaluation systems built around standardized criteria that offer no opportunity for individualizing supervisory practices.

In its most effective format, the goal setting process is a cooperative activity between the supervisor and the teacher that results in the establishment of a mutually agreeable focus. The goal(s) become the core of the evaluation/supervision process. In an earlier article in Educational Leadership[3], the author explains in more detail the attitudes, definitions, and

strategies that characterize effective goal setting systems. For our purposes here, suffice it to say that the ability to individualize criteria and the closer, more cooperative nature of the supervisor-teacher relationship that is fostered by the use of goal setting makes it a practice virtually necessary to insure effective evaluation/supervision systems.

V. Narrowed Focus on Teaching

More and more we are recognizing that in order to have an impact on instructional practices supervisors and teachers must have some common framework and a similar set of definitions about teaching from which to work. For instructional supervision and the improvement of instruction to be a reality, all persons involved need an increased knowledge of classroom teaching skills. This is the bottom line of effective supervision of instruction.

Fortunately, we are at a time when we know more about teaching and its impact on student learning than we ever have before. Increasingly, the evaluation/supervision systems that are functioning most effectively are being based on a particular approach to the teaching act and using that as the framework for the instructional interaction between supervisors and teachers. At this point, the two most useful and frequently mentioned ways of narrowing the focus of teaching are provided by the growing body of work being done under the label of the Teacher Effectiveness Research[4] and secondly by the work of Madeline Hunter and her colleagues at UCLA.[5] Both of these are effective and useful because of their focus on teacher/teaching behaviors and because of the inherent common sense approach that characterizes many of their recommended practices. By adopting some common way of looking at teaching and then providing all the people involved in the process with the

same set of definitions and explanations the liklihood of more effective and cooperative supervisory experiences is enhanced significantly.

VI. Use of a Modified Clinical Supervision Format

Clinical supervision has long been a respected and recommended supervisory model. However, the complete application of the model in local school systems is not often a practical possibility. This would seem to be true in light of the required training period, and the time requirements, and the inconsistencies between the philosophic underpinnings of clinical supervision and the nature of supervision as carried out by line administrators as part of an evaluation procedure. Nevertheless, since the major form of data collection used in schools is classroom observation, the use of preconferences prior to observation as suggested by clinical supervision is becoming increasingly frequent in schools.[6]

There are two primary ways to increase the reliability of classroom observation. The first is to narrow the range of things one looks for during observation. This can be accomplished by using a goal setting process; by operating in a system that is based on a narrowed focus on teaching such as described in the previous section; or by using some type of observation guide or focusing instrument. The second way to increase the reliability is directly related to the kind and amount of information a person has <u>prior</u> to an observation. Consequently, the use of the pre-conference is seen as a useful and practical way to improve classroom observations. Clearly, the use of at least this part of clinical supervision can improve the effectiveness of an evaluation system.

VII. The Use of Alternative Sources of Data

Most evaluation systems that exist in this country rely almost exclusively on the use of observation to collect data about teaching performance. While observation is useful and can be reliable under most circumstances especially as described in the previous section, it is only one of a number of ways that data about teaching can be collected. Among the alternatives are self evaluation, peer evaluation, parent evaluation, student evaluation, student performance, and artifact collection. While each of these has some potential and usefulness, my experience suggests that only three ways are practical. These three ways seem to be growing in their inclusion in the most effective of evaluation systems. The first of these sources is classroom observation, but particularly observations directed toward collecting descriptive data relevant to pre-established goals. And, as suggested in VI above, observations following pre-conferences.

The second source of data is the use of student evaluation. More accurately as it is being recommended here, student description data. In terms of usefulness in a school evaluation/supervision system it appears to be more reliable and hence more valuable to have students respond to written and/or oral statements that ask for their perceptions of what occurs or exists in a classroom, rather than have them rate the teacher. For example, having students respond to "the teacher has favorites," is a personal rating item as opposed to having students respond to "everyone is treated fairly in here," which is more descriptive than judgmental.

The third type of data collection that should be a regular part of a system is artifact collection. Artifacts include such things as, study guides, questions sheets, homework assignments, practice sets, experiments, descriptions of drills and practice activities, quizzes, and tests. The importance of

collecting and reviewing teacher artifacts takes on tremendous importance when one begins to review some of the teacher effectiveness research which show that 50% to 70% of the average student's day in school (50% to 60% grades 7-12; 60% to 70% grades K6) is spent in seat work and related activities.[7] Concepts of classroom planning can be developed through the collection and subsequent discussion of teacher artifacts by the supervisor and the teacher that go considerably beyond traditional planning notions built around a lesson plan orientation.

The use of these multiple sources of data is generally not required of tenured teachers, but rather is used by mutual agreement between supervisor and teacher as dictated by the type of goal(s) set by the teacher

VIII. Different Requirements for Tenured and Non-Tenured Teachers

Most evaluation systems apply the same procedures and requirements to tenured and non-tenured teachers. The only thing that differentiates the two is that "it" happens more frequently to the non-tenured teacher ("all non-tenured teachers will be evaluated at least twice each semester. All tenured teachers will be evaluated at least once each year") These two groups are not the same and the requirements concerning their participation in the system should be different.

With non-tenured teachers the evaluation system has two distinct purposes. One is to provide the administration with data to be used in making retention decisions. Secondly, the system must provide the beginner with a support process that improves teaching skills and gives them a positive image of what supervision can be. In order to meet these purposes, more and more schools are accepting the recommendation that the following conditions be a part of the required evaluation process for non-tenured teachers: (1) In a

goal setting system, the goals are pre-established for the non-tenured teachers. Most beginners are not sophisticated nor confident enough to set their own goals. It is best to have a regular set of goals for beginning teachers set primarily around planning and management skills; (2) regular observation, with pre and post conferences with most observations being a part of a two or three day consecutive visit sequence; (3) at least once each semester student descriptive data collected from one of the teacher's classes. The data is used formatively by the supervisor and the teacher and is maintained in the teacher's portfolio; (4) at least once each semester for a two to three week period, or for a unit of work, all artifacts used and/or produced by the teacher are collected and reviewed with the supervisor. The comments and suggestions made, and the artifacts themselves are kept in the teacher's portfolio.

As suggested in the earlier sections, since the purpose of an evaluation system for tenured teachers should be to improve instruction, they should be fully involved. They should be active participants in the goal setting process and the different data sources should be used only as they are relevant to the established goals. Also, while non-tenured teachers go through the evaluation process continuously, tenured teachers go through the system only every second or third year. This is based on considerable experience showing that the more extensive contact between supervisor and teacher over the course of a year in a well developed goal setting system is much more effective in altering classrrom teaching behavior than is the perfunctory unfocused yearly visits that characterize most local evaluation systems.

IX. A Complete Training Program

An evaluation system is effective in direct relation to the amount of training received by all the participants. Too often teachers and supervisors are expected to operate within systems that demand skills or understandings to which they have not been exposed. Consequently they are forced to fall back on old practices and attitudes that are not appropriate nor supportive of a new system.

From the perspective of the commonalities discussed here, an appropriate training program would include goal setting skills for both supervisors and teachers; definitions, explanations, examples, and practice in the selected teaching focus; explanation of, and practice in, the use of student descriptive data and artifact collection; classroom observation skills for supervisors; conferencing skills for supervisors; and a general review for all participants covering the prevailing attitude towards the purpose of evaluation in the local district and how the system and the expectations toward the participants in the system are congruent with that attitude. In many instances, the training can be accomplished in relatively short periods of time. Much of the initial training can be handled in a six to eight hour time block for supervisors and five hours for classroom teachers.

As suggested earlier, these nine commonalities should not be interpreted as a model evaluation system. Rather they should be used as a basis for reviewing current practices in local districts, and as a starting point for districts if they do wish to redesign their present systems.

FOOTNOTES

[1]See A. Kaplan. The Conduct of Inquiry. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1964 for a more complete discussion on the concept of subjectivity.

[2]M. J. Zelenak and B. C. Snider. "Teachers Don't Resent Evaluation--If It's For the Improvement of Instruction." Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 55, Jan., 1974, p. 384.

[3]Thomas L. McGreal. "Helping Teachers Set Goals." Educational Leadership, Vol. 37, No. 5, Feb., 1980, p. 414.

[4]As an example of some of the encouraging work being done in the area of teacher effectiveness see C. Denham and A. Lieberman (Ed.). Time to Learn. A Review of the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing, 1020 "O" Street, Sacramento, California. Also for an example of the use of the Teacher Effectiveness Research in a local district evaluation system, contact Mr. Dale Jones, Asst. Supt., West Aurora Public Schools, Aurora, Illinois.

[5]Two of many sources describing Hunter's work are M. Hunter. "Teacher Competency: Problem, Theory, Practice." Theory Into Practice. Vol. 15, April, 1976, p. 169 and M. Hunter. Prescription for Improved Instruction. El Segundo, California: TIP Publications, 1976.

[6]For a practical discussion of Clinical Supervision see K. Acheson and M. Gall, Techniques in the Clinical Supervision of Teachers, New York: Longman, Inc., 1980.

[7]Barak Rosenshine, "Content, Time, and Direct Instruction." In P. Peterson and H. Walberg (ed.). Research on Teaching, Berkely, California: McCutchan Pub. Company, 1979.